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A World Boundary Commission.

One of the speakers at the recent Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration made the suggestion that the time may not be far off when it will be practicable for the nations of the earth to unite in naming a commission to settle all the boundary disputes of the world now pending and to fix any undetermined boundaries not yet in controversy.

Two or three decades ago such a proposition would have seemed the height of foolishness; but now it has come within the range of entire reasonableness. There are not many important boundaries remaining unsettled. Most of the nations are now fixed within well-defined limits. But there are still a few sections of the globe where the boundaries have not been finally determined, and one or more of these keeps coming up every year for adjustment. They are the cause of a great deal of misunderstanding and not a little illwill. There are pending at the present time seven or eight boundary disputes before boards of arbitration or commissions, — our Alaska controversy with Canada, two or three between South American States, and as many more in Africa. Others are sure to arise in Africa and in Asia.

Why not have a commission of one hundred men chosen by the governments to fix once for all these

boundaries? The thing is much more practicable than it at first thought seems. Travel to all parts of the world is now easy. Communication by post and wire is swift. International coöperation through diplomacy or by conference is a part of the settled order of things. If twenty-six powers could unite at The Hague three years ago in the discussion of the important subjects there considered, and all the States of this hemisphere last winter in Mexico in considering and acting upon a number of subjects affecting deeply their interests, why might not the more than forty powers of the entire world join in a commission for the purpose here suggested, with the hope of entire success?

Some of these boundary questions have produced, as we have said, a good deal of misunderstanding and ill feeling. Others that will arise are sure to do so hereafter. If these boundaries could be all finally and definitely determined by joint action of the powers, it would take entirely out of the field of controversy a very troublesome class of questions. This would be one of the greatest international peace measures which the world has seen. The nations would thus have pledged themselves to stand by and see maintained the boundaries which they had helped to determine. There would be little room or disposition left for territorial aggression, and wars from this cause would henceforth become virtually impossible. What a vast saving of resources and energy now misspent in quarreling and preparing to fight over these unsettled boundaries would result!

By such action no nation would suffer in either its honor or its legitimate territory. Small nations, the mission of which in civilization is in many instances of the greatest moment, would thus receive assurance of a life of continued security and freedom to do their work. Native races might thus be saved for development and civilization. The temptation to great nations to abuse their power would be almost entirely taken away, and the movement of peoples toward brotherhood and mutual service would receive an almost resistless impulse forward.

The world has moved long enough in fragments, in sections, in continents, in hemispheres. It is destined hereafter to move as a whole, as one round sphere, as one humanity. This idea of a World Boundary Commission is, therefore, worthy of the serious attention of diplomats and statesmen, as an

immediately practicable one. There is scarcely any direction that one can think of in which the result of the work of such a commission would not be productive of immeasurable blessing to mankind. The idea is a large one, we know, but that is in its favor in these days when one is compelled to think in continents, oceans, and hemispheres; or, rather, when every question has become a world question.

Lessons of the South African War.

III.

A third lesson which the conflict in South Africa has forcibly brought home is that war is essentially cruel and inhuman, and that it can never be made anything else. Every war teaches afresh this lesson—so soon forgotten. All talk about “humanizing” war is, if not subterfuge, at least confusion of ideas. War is brutal, full of surging passion and nameless deeds, and attended with much hard injustice even at its best. Whatever attendant evils may be cut off,—and many have been,—these are not really a part of war at all, but other exhibitions of brutal savagery which go along with it, often growing inevitably out of it. That which remains—battles, ambuscades, bombardments, burning of buildings, wasting of territories, imprisonments, slaughter of men, women and children, desolation of homes—is always the same atrocious thing, incapable in its very nature of being improved except in the most unimportant particulars.

The South African war ought to have made all this clear to the slowest mind. The fearful scenes at the Tugela, the Modder, at Magersfontein and at Spion Kop, to say nothing of the veritable massacres in some of the small ambuscades, though easily matched in other wars, appear to humane minds like acts in a drama of hell. It would seem impossible that human beings could be found participating in such scenes, if the fact were not so common.

There is little in the history of warfare more loathsome than the South African reconcentrado camps in which women, children and old men were shut up to die by the thousands, of neglect, disease and semi-starvation. The story of the wholesale burning and pillaging of the Boer homes and farms will go down in history as one of the cruelest of war's relentless performances.

We suppose that the slaughter in battle, or the riding and driving to death, of nearly half a million horses, which has scarcely been noticed during the progress of the war, will soon be forgotten, as a system which has in it no pity for human beings cannot be expected to have any feelings for dumb brutes.

War, even when waged by professedly Christian people, is made up of these ghastly things. They are not incidental to it; they are of its very substance. It is true that the destruction of the Boer

homes, the herding of the people in death camps, etc., were plain violations of the laws of so-called “civilized” warfare as they were laid down at The Hague, and solemnly signed by Great Britain's representatives. But, though condemned by the conscience of the world, and by the formulated laws of war, they were justified by the English government on the ground of military necessity—a law of combat absolutely supreme over all others. The rules of war as laid down by the Lieber code, the Brussels declaration and the Hague Convention are not only powerless in the great emergencies of war, but they all contain permissions under “the necessities of war” which make way for and lead to the condonement of any extremity of severity which may be committed. Witness our government's performances in the Philippines.

War can never be humanized and civilized; and the energies of thought spent in trying to accomplish this impossible task would be much better employed in trying to secure, by judicial and moral means, its entire abolition.

IV.

The Boer conflict has also taught again that in war it is not right but might that wins. The Boers went into the struggle absolutely convinced of the justice of their cause, so deeply convinced of it that they devoutly believed that God would give them the victory against no matter what odds on the British side. The conscience of the entire civilized world was, in the main, with them, and judged England to be chiefly responsible for the war; and many believed with the Boers that the general justice of their cause as against England's injustice and aggression would certainly be supported by God and secure them the victory. But God seems to have had little respect for this judgment, and to have paid no appreciable heed to the Boers' prayers. They went down finally under England's superior might, as they would have gone down if Great Britain had had no grain of justice on her side.

In England there has been a good deal of childish jubilation and foolish givings of thanks in many churches,—state and nonconformist,—as if the British success were due to the blessing of God because of the justice of their pretensions. But no sensible Englishman—at least no “patriotic” Englishman—would seriously confess that five English soldiers could not have conquered one Boer; that a great empire could not have mastered a mere handful of people without the special favor of God. England has conquered the Boers, destroyed their national independence, and annexed their territory, not because her contention in the quarrel was right and theirs wrong, but because her forces were, all things considered, stronger than the Boer forces. That is the law of war, as history teaches on a thousand